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## ORIGIN OF *MAS* OR *BAR* AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ITS MEANINGS<sup>1</sup>

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THE SIGN *MAS* = , in its archaic form , was a cross. This symbol, which was sacred in pre-Christian as well as in Christian times, led to so many developments, magical, religious, and astronomical, among the various races of antiquity, that it would lead too far afield to consider it in this aspect, except in so far as this character of the *MAS* sign will help us understand the enormous linguistic development to which it gave rise and the processes of suggestion through which they were evolved.

The sign also had the value *BAR*, but this value, later on, I believe, came to be chiefly, though not exclusively, attached to the form  archaic , so that, though in some cases, such as  'twin' 175, 181;  'companion' 183;  'bright' 20, 103;  'shine' 46;  'half' 106, 169;  'cut in two' 33;  'section' 101;  'separation' 120;  'chief' 15;  'strong' 17;  'dwell' 14;  'dwelling' 180 (numbers refer to *B. W.* 77), they have the same signification, there gradually gathered around each certain meanings mutually exclusive. The fact is, as we shall see, two pictographs represented two kinds of tools for producing the same result.

Previous views on the origin of *MAS* may be found summarized in Barton's *Babylonian Writing*, 2. 45. They all ascribe several origins to the sign, a view which the writer also held until convinced of its incorrectness. To claim that all the 166 known Semitic equivalents can be explained through this new theory would be to claim too much, but that an overwhelming number can be so explained is beyond doubt.

The principal meanings of *MAS* and *BAR* as given in Sumerian vocabularies, cf. Delitzsch, *Sumerische Sprachlehre*, are:

<sup>1</sup> Semitic equivalents, their sources and all but a few of the translations in this paper are taken from Prof. George A. Barton's indispensable *Babylonian Writing*, part II, under sign 77.

*MAŠ*. 'clear, pure; first, chief; twin.'

*BAR*. 'decide, divide, half, bind, surround, side.'

There are, however, other meanings such as 'fire, magic, conjurer,' which have been considered secondary.

Now if we can find in our sign the pictograph of some primitive article of universal use from which the ideas underlying these meanings could have arisen, and if we can show, among primitive races recent and living, a use of this tool with notions attached to it similar to those found in Babylonian syllabaries, it is very likely that we have the conditions necessary to solve the problem. Such an article I believe will be found in the most primitive form of fire sticks and fire drills and the ideas associated with them. If this be so, it will not be necessary to suppose more than one pictograph from which almost all the meanings were derived.

In order to show that a connection of ideas exists between practically all the chief meanings of *MAŠ* or *BAR*, it will be necessary to consider the nature and uses of fire-sticks and the accounts we have of their use among the ancients and among present day primitive people. By consulting the index to the 3d edition of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, also the article on 'Fire' in 11th *Britannica*, and particularly E. B. Tylor's *Researches in the Early History of Mankind*, page 238 ff., we shall find abundant illustrations of kindling fire by wood friction.

In the *Britannica* we read: 'In Cochin China two pieces of bamboo are considered sufficient [to produce fire], the silicious character of the outside layer rendering it as good as native flint,' i. e. one piece of bamboo was simply rubbed across the other until fire was produced.

Tylor, on 252, states: 'In East Asia and in Great Malay, Islands of Borneo and Sumatra, Marsden says he has seen fire produced by rubbing one bit of bamboo with a sharp edge across another.'

Bamboo exists in Babylonia and was probably known to the Sumerians in their primitive habitat. If used in this way the act of making fire would form a *MAŠ* (i. e. a cross) of the sticks, which was doubtless the most primitive method of making fire.

Tylor, in a series of graphics, shows in addition three other methods of producing fire by friction of wood: one is by the

stick and groove; another by rotation of a pointed stick, like an arrow shaft, in a round hole made near the end of another stick or piece of wood; and, finally, rotation by a string or bow-drill.

Attention is called here especially to the second of these methods, i. e. the rotation of a pointed stick in a hole near the end of another stick. The Bushman of Australia squats on one end of the second stick and twirls the other rapidly between the palms of his hands until fire is produced and caught in some tinder by another Bushman, who then blows it into a flame.

Now such a tool, if pictured, would look like *BAR* =  or  and being merely an advance on the simpler *MAŠ* = , would originally convey the same ideas. Why Babylonians, in the course of time, gradually attached one set of meanings to *MAŠ* and another set to *BAR* cannot be answered, but the process of suggestion that caused the different classes of meanings to arise from the primitive fire-stick or drill is not so difficult to understand, if we bear in mind that we are dealing with habits and thinking of primitive man, to whom the making of fire was a magic act and would seem like drawing light and heat from the sun or from heaven. In fact we know that the making of *new* fire was performed by the magician, and later, for religion, by the priest.

So far as we know, man has known how to produce fire since diluvial times. Pieces of charcoal and burnt bones have been found in diluvial limestone caverns with the relics of the mammoth and the cave bear.

Osborn, in *Men of the Old Stone Age*, p. 165, says: 'The first positive evidences of the use of fire are layers of charred wood and bones frequently found in the industrial deposits of early Acheulean times; not less than 50,000 years ago.'

*Homo sapiens* seems always and everywhere to have known the art of making fire, and it is no wonder that a symbol so long in use should, in the course of ages, have suggested many things which it was supposed to be and to effect.

Thirteen meanings, such as *išu* 'wood,' *tu'amu* 'twins,' *kadâdu* 'bow down,' *qantarîtu* 'a reed that fits in,' could be derived from the simple bamboo sticks or the fire drill and the way in which they were used. Here may be added also  = *ii'kilallan*, 'the double god' (the two sacred sticks?).

Thirty-six equivalents would be suggested by the effect produced, i. e. fire and known effects of light and heat on vegetation. Some of these are *nûru* 'fire, light'; *tîltu* 'flame'; *kabâbu ša išâti* 'to kindle,' said of a fire; *barâru* 'shine'; *mašû* 'be bright'; *šîru* 'morning'; *šamsû* 'sun'; *naṭâlu* 'look, see'; *uššubu* (*BAR*) 'sprout'<sup>2</sup>; *ibbu* (*MAŠ*) 'fruit.' These and 26 other words not including the gods  $\text{𒀭}$  = Nergal, a sun god (midday sun) = Ninib, the eastern sun, = Gibil, the fire god, and some others into the composition of which *MAŠ* or *BAR* enter such as *Šamaš*, <sup>d</sup>*Mu-bar-ra* = <sup>d</sup>*Giš-bar*, etc., show clearly that fire and the making of fire was an original, inherent meaning of *MAŠ*.

We come now to the question, How did prehistoric men reason about fire? To what source did they ascribe it? How did they explain the process necessary to obtain it? They knew nothing of the laws of physics, and investigations among primitives prove that, in the earliest stage of spiritual development, they are thoroughly animistic and ascribe objects and events they do not understand to supernatural causes.

That this was the case with fire we have abundant proofs, both in ancient myths, such as that of Prometheus, who was said to have brought stolen fire to mankind from Olympus in a hollow reed, and among modern savages and ancient cults such as those of India.

Frazer in *Spirits of the Corn and the Wild*, 265, tells us that the Caffres, at their festival of the new fruits, insisted these must be cooked with new fire before a general use of them was allowed. This new, sacred fire was kindled by the friction of two sticks of the *Uswati* tree, prepared by the sorcerer. When the magician has lit the new fire he hands the fire sticks back to the chief, for no other hand may touch them.

Again Frazer 2, ch. 15, 'Magic Art,' says: 'The sticks among the Herero were held to be sacred and were guarded by the chief in whose family they were hereditary and near whose house the

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<sup>2</sup> It is a confirmation of the connection of sun and heat with sprouting that we find in *BW* 2. 337<sub>ss</sub> *UD* = *bañabu* 'sprout' and 266. *BURU* = *inbu* 'fruit' (result of sprouting), for the pictograph of *UD* was a rising sun and *BURU* was, as Barton suggests from Dr. Ward's *SCWA* p. 394, 'an old sun symbol,' namely a cross, usually represented on Babylonian seals and monuments by the four-pointed star.

perpetual fire was kept burning. If this fire by any accident was extinguished, or if new fire was to be made, these sticks were called into requisition.'

As for the use of a sacred, perpetual fire and new fire in religion, it will only be necessary to mention the perpetual fire kept up by the vestals in Rome where, if by any accident the fire was extinguished, a new one was made according to a regular ritual, not with flint and steel which the Romans knew, but by the fire-drill consisting of two pieces of wood.

We know that in Egypt, Babylonia, and Greece, as well as among the Aztecs and Incas, there were temples with perpetual fires, survivals of which we have still with us in the eternal lamps of the synagogues and the perpetual lights in Roman Catholic, Greek and High Episcopal churches.

As for the new fire and the sacred significance attached to it, I believe we have a survival of it in the Easter Eve Holy Fire of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was originally no doubt new fire produced by wood friction and believed to be from heaven, as many of the Russian pilgrims who take it all the way back to Russia to light anew sanctuary lamps of their home churches believe it to be to-day.

Tylor, *Anthropology*, p. 16, tells us that in India 'though people have for ages kindled fire for practical use with the flint and steel, yet the Brahmans, to make the sacred fire for the daily sacrifice, still use the barbaric art of violently boring a pointed stick into another piece of wood till a spark comes. Asked why they thus waste their labor when they know better, they answer that they do it to get pure and *holy* fire.' Once more, Frazer, 'Magic Art,' p. 253, says: 'At Port Stevens, in New South Wales, the medicine-men used to drive away rain by throwing fire-sticks into the air, while at the same time they puffed and shouted.'

From all this it will be seen that, if I am right in my theory that the sign *MAŠ* arose from the crossed fire-sticks, there is a connection between that sign and magic because of the supposed heavenly origin of the fire and the supernatural power of the sorcerer who could call that fire down.

When, later, magic gave place to religion, when the diviner and the astrologer took the place of the magician, remembering that the new fire was made to the accompaniment first of incan-

tations and then of prayers, we should expect exactly such meanings as we find attached to this sign.

We have already considered the meanings derived from the tools or fire-sticks, and those from the effect of using them. In addition to these are such as are derived from the supposed origin and nature of the fire.

As fire was thought to be brought down from the sun, or from heaven, the act of bringing it down was looked upon as magic and the man who brought it down as a magician. It has been abundantly shown by Frazer and others, that among primitive savages no one in the tribe had a more influential position than the sorcerer or magician. Hence we are not surprised to find meanings for *MAŠ* arising from the position in the tribe of magicians, diviners and priests who called down the heavenly fire and by its means, through fire gods, were able to control and banish evil spirits as well as procure blessings for mankind.

Thus we have: *amelâšipu* 'exorcist'; *barû* 'a seer'; *mašmaššu* 'conjurer'; *massu bîtu* 'the *massu* (priest) of the temple,' who may have made the new fire; *zânâna* 'rain.'

Then, as indicating something sacred, or taboo: *ahû* 'strange, hostile'; *balû* and *bêltu* 'fright, terror'; *amelzâ'iru* (*BAR*) 'adversary'; *kapâru* 'ruin'; *lâ sanâku* 'not oppress.'

As results of divination: *kašâdu* 'capture'; *mašâru* (*BAR*) 'lead, send away' (bad spirits?); *nussû* 'separation'; *palâhu* 'fear'; *takâpu* 'overpower'?; *kabattu* 'liver' (cf. liver divination); *zâru* 'hate,' whose seat is in the liver; *zukkû* 'pure, clean' (from *zakû*? *Piel*?).

We have also cosmological ideas, as the sign *MAŠ* divided the zodiac into quarters, such as *mašlu* 'midst'; *šadâdu* 'be wide, large'; *padânu* 'road.' There are 24 more *MAŠ* and *BAR* equivalents which I have placed under the general head of magic.

The meanings thus far seem to show that the signs *MAŠ* or *BAR* were pictographs of a pair of fire-sticks, that they meant fire and that this fire was magical and sacred. The act of producing fire by friction of wood was thus an act of magic and later of divination.

With this meaning attached to the sign in the Babylonian mind it was perfectly natural that, in the course of time, there should develop a large number of derived, associated or suggested mean-

ings so that in *MAŠ* and *BAR* we have the root of all or almost all of the 166 known equivalents.

The magician among primitive savages was and is the chief man of the tribe. Hence *asaridu* 'first, chief'; and by association, *ezzu* 'strong'; *ēnitu* 'lordship'; *urigallu* 'elder brother'; *ṣēru* 'high, lofty' (possibly cosmological); *ṣutqu* 'renowned.'

Again with the incantations and ritual associated with fire and the fire gods we find formulas and hymns for binding and banishing evil spirits. Hence a large group of secondary meanings which became conventionalized and led to developments in which all resemblance to the original meaning of the sign is lost: as *BAR* = *kamū* 'bind' 'seize' 'lead captive,' *itiātu* and other words signifying 'enclosure, boundary, section, portion'; *mahazu* 'city,' i. e. an enclosed place; *āsibu* 'dwell'; *kîmtu* 'kindred, family'; and *sindu* 'yoke.'

From 'bind, surround' were derived such meanings as *ahu* and *pûdu* 'side'; *arkâtu* 'behind, after'; *ahuru* 'westward'; *ahru* 'future'; *ṣētu* 'exit,' i. e. outside; *zumru* 'body,' i. e. outside of a man; and *pagru* 'corpse,' i. e. separated because taboo.

Perhaps the chief function of a diviner was to interpret omens and give decisions. A decision implies a division of possibilities, accordingly we have *MAŠ* = *paruššu*, *mêrišu*, *tišmittu*, meaning 'decision.'

While it is possible that such meanings as *šunnû* 'one half,' *uššuru* 'cut in two,' and others signifying 'half, divide, separate,' originated in the cutting across each other of the sticks to produce fire, it seems more reasonable to suppose they were derived from the idea of 'decision,' from which would also arise such words as *hasâsu* 'think, remember'; *sabru* 'understanding'; and *bitramu* 'a fox?' possibly from its cunning; *galalu* 'small,' and *kisittu* 'fodder,' perhaps were also suggested by 'divide.' Whether *karpatṣâtu* and other words for sacrificial vessels were due to association with the fire ritual I cannot say, but it seems so.

Besides the above groups of equivalents for *MAŠ* and *BAR* there is a group meaning 'produce, increase, wages, cattle,' evidently due to a confusion of  with  which had a different origin. *Sipru ša issuri* 'claw, of a bird,' arose from a supposed resemblance of the sign to birds' claws. There are, in

addition, twenty equivalents of doubtful or unknown meanings which I have, of course, omitted.

On the whole it seems reasonable to conclude that *MAŠ* or *BAR* and its meanings originated in a pictograph of fire-sticks.

The following note contains remarks made, after the reading of the paper, by Professor Julian Morgenstern:

REMARKS BY DR. JULIAN MORGENSTERN.

Dr. Nies' chain of argument, it would seem, would be rounded out, if it could be shown that the practice of kindling new fires on appropriate occasions was practiced by Semitic peoples in general, and by the Babylonians in particular.

Dr. Nies has correctly referred to the ceremony of the descent of the sacred fire in the Church of the Sepulchre at Jerusalem on the late afternoon before Easter Sunday. On this occasion, not only are the lights in the church extinguished and then rekindled from the new fire, but also in Christian homes and sanctuaries throughout the land, fires are extinguished, to be rekindled from the new fire from the Church of the Sepulchre, ceremoniously brought by runners, carefully selected for this task (cf. the detailed description in Wilson, *Peasant Life in the Holy Land*, 45f.). In a paper, as yet unpublished, I have collected abundant evidence that this supposed descent of fire from heaven, and the kindling therefrom of new fires upon the altars of temples, were ancient Semitic new year rites. For this reason temples seem to have been dedicated regularly at the new year festival.

Thus Solomon's temple was dedicated at the Succoth festival (I Ki. 8). The dedicatory rites obviously culminated on the eighth day of the festival, the pre-exilic new year's day (cf. my *Two Ancient Israelite Agricultural Festivals*, *JQR* (new series), 8 (1917). 42). On this day the *kebod Yahwe*, the fiery form supposed to be assumed by the Deity, according to the theology of the Priestly Code, when revealing himself to mortals (cf. my *Biblical Theophanies*, *ZA* 25. 151), filled the temple, so that the priests could not remain there (1 Ki. 8. 10f.).

Likewise in the Pg account of the dedication of the tabernacle in the wilderness, the culminating rites of the descent of fire from the *kebod Yahwe* and the miraculous kindling of the sacred flame upon the altar, took place upon the eighth day of the dedicatory exercises, manifestly coincident with the eighth day of the festival (Lev. 9. 1 and 24). Since in Lev. 16 the legislation for the tenth day of the seventh month, the late, post-exilic Day of Atonement, but the pre-exilic new year's day, followed in Pg immediately after the account of the dedication of the tabernacle in the wilderness, the consecration of Aaron and his sons, and the death of the two sons of Aaron, because they brought *strange* fire, i. e. fire not from off the altar, and therefore not emanating from the *kebod Yahwe*, it may be inferred that this eight-day dedication period was coincident with the early Succoth-new year festival from the 3rd through the 10th of the seventh month, and that, here

too, the descent of fire, the culminating dedicatory rite, was on the new year's day. Secondary priestly tradition, probably under Babylonian influence, transferred the date of dedication of the tabernacle from the Succoth-festival to the first eight days of Nisan (Ex. 40. 1).

It is interesting to note in this connection that Clay, *Miscellaneous Inscriptions in the Yale Babylonian Collection* (Yale Oriental Series—Babylonian Texts), no. 52, pp. 81ff., records the dedication of a temple at Erech in 244 B. C., which culminated with the entrance of Anum and Antum into the shrine on the 8th of Nisan. It may be inferred that the full dedication celebration lasted from the 1st through the 8th of Nisan. In other words this temple, too, was probably dedicated at the Babylonian new year period. The ceremonial entrance of the gods and goddesses into their sacred shrines seems to have been an important rite of the celebration of the Babylonian *zag-muk* or new year festival. Gudea, too, dedicated at least one, and probably more temples upon the *zag-muk* festival: Statue B, VII, 26-36 (Jensen, *KB* 3<sup>1</sup>, 40-41; Thureau-Dangin, *VAB* 1. 72-73); VIII, 11; XXIII, 4; Statue G, II, 1ff.; III, 5ff. (Jensen 60-61; Thureau-Dangin, 84-85); Cyl. B. III, 5ff. (Thureau-Dangin, 124-125); XVII, 18ff. (Thureau-Dangin, 138-139). The dedication ceremonies continued for seven days. During the festival week the servant was equal to his master and rejoiced along with him just as at the Biblical Succoth-festival. The first month was called by Gudea **ITÚ-É-BA**, the Month of the Temple (Cyl. B, III, 7). In other words, this seems to have been the regular annual season for temple-dedications in Babylon. Probably at this season the new fire was kindled in the temples, and may even have been thought to have descended from heaven on the new year's day.

It is possibly significant too that in the old Sumerian list of months Ab was called **ITÚ-NE-NE-GAR**, the month of making fires (Delitzsch, *Lesestücke*<sup>4</sup>, 114; Brünnow, *List*, 4621). All this would tend to indicate that the kindling of sacred fires was an ancient and established religious ceremony in Babylon.